



Healthy School Nutrition Environment

"The link between good nutrition and good education is clearly demonstrated by higher test scores, better attendance and fewer behavior problems in school."

— Former Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman

Did You Know...

A healthy school nutrition environment gives students consistent, reliable health information and opportunities to use it?

☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Health messages should be consistent in the classroom, the cafeteria and during school activities. *True.*

☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** School environments should allow students to practice making healthy lifestyle choices. *True.*

Imagine a school where students are exposed to only healthful, nutritious foods they like. It can happen when National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, fund-raising efforts, and à la carte and vending machine selections support this goal.

Why is a healthy school nutrition environment so important?

Proper nutrition is related to growth and development and fuels brain cells for optimal learning.

Unhealthy eating habits contribute to health problems that are established early in life; people who have unhealthy eating habits tend to maintain these habits as they age.

The Issue...

Is not whether schools have vending machines or school stores, but rather what foods are offered. Limiting low-nutrient foods and expanding food choices to include more healthful choices, such as dairy, fruits and vegetables, can help reinforce a total school environment conducive to health. *Provide low fat flavored milk as an alternative to fruit drinks or soft drinks.*

Do your students have enough time to eat?

Is nutrition taught in the classroom

and then low-nutrient food sold to raise money?

Are healthy choices available

at school parties and after-school activities?

Does your school offer breakfast

only during exam week?

Regulations governing the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs prohibit the sale of foods of minimal nutritional value in the school food service area during meal times.

The sale of these foods undermines school feeding program goals and nutrition education. *Move vending machines away from the cafeteria and turn them off until after lunch.*

Stock vending machines with fresh sandwiches, fruit, milk, yogurt and vegetables.

We have an opportunity and responsibility to promote knowledge and behaviors that improve health, intellectual development, and overall quality of life. *Students, parents, teachers, school officials, and community and business leaders must be actively involved in ensuring that school environments promote good health.*

A Healthy School Nutrition Environment Includes...



Nutrition education in the curriculum from pre-K through grade 12.



Foods sold that support nutrition goals rather than profits.



Lunch periods long enough to give students time to enjoy eating in pleasant surroundings.

USDA Statistics...

U.S. Department of Agriculture studies pinpoint trends that are shortchanging this generation's short- and long-term health:

- Only 2 percent** of children meet the dietary goals of the Food Pyramid. Less than 15 percent eat the recommended servings of fruit; less than 20 percent meet vegetable recommendations; and only 30 percent drink enough milk.
- Fewer than 60 percent** of students choose the National School Lunch Program.
- Nearly half of 12- to 21-year-olds** are not physically active on a regular basis. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled since 1970. Childhood obesity is recognized as a national epidemic.

- Teenagers today drink twice** as much carbonated soda as milk. From ages 9 through the teen years, only 19 percent of girls and 52 percent of boys meet calcium recommendations. Nearly half of adult bone mass is formed during adolescence. At a time when young people should be building peak bone mass, they are setting themselves up instead for crippling osteoporosis.
- Type II diabetes** was once considered an adult disease, but it is now seen among overweight children. Doctors are finding risk factors for heart disease in more than 60 percent of overweight children ages 5 to 20.

Let's Stop Giving Our Kids Mixed Messages...

Healthy habits are taught in the classroom, but the effect is diluted when students receive candy as rewards, or when freedom to choose means soft drinks and sweets. Reversing unhealthy eating trends must be a cooperative effort between schools, parents, student organizations and community leaders who are willing to value, model and promote a school environment that supports development of healthy eating patterns — and then fund it.

Be a Positive Role Model with Food and Lifestyle Choices...

- ✦ Reward students with extra computer or gym time; lunch with the teacher or principal; recognition in school announcements or newsletters; tokens students redeem for prizes, such as renting the teacher's desk for the day.
- ✦ Instead of selling low-nutrient food for fund-raising efforts, consider gift wrap, flowers, greeting cards, clothing with school logo, or seasonal items such as pumpkins, wreaths or singing-grams. Sell donated Halloween costumes, organize a school carnival, sponsor a golf tournament, have a chili supper, or pave a walkway by selling family name plates.



Shining Stars...

The Sweetwater County School District #1, Wyoming school board decided no competitive foods would be sold during lunch. Bake sales are held after lunch or after school. Vending machine sales are allowed only after the school day ends.

Colorado's West Grand High School's student council decided health was more important than profit. West Grand's school health coordinator, student council and school food service wanted morning breaks supplied by school food service. Bagels, juice, fruit and milk were offered and vending machines turned off. Though the student council lost \$1,000 from vending machine revenue, they voted to continue healthier options for morning breaks.

West Virginia Board of Education prohibits the sale of chewing gum, flavored ice bars and candy bars, foods or drinks containing 40 percent or more by weight of sugar or other sweeteners, juice or juice products containing less than 20 percent real fruit or vegetable juice, and foods with more than 8 grams of fat per 1-ounce serving. Soft drinks are prohibited at elementary and middle schools.

Foods to Grow On...

Food at school should be tasty and easy to eat. Consider:

- ✦ Bread sticks, bagels, muffins, cereal bars, hot pretzels, ready-to-eat cereal
- ✦ Banana chips, dried apples, peaches, apricots
- ✦ Fig Newtons®, vanilla wafers, animal crackers
- ✦ Snack Bags with fresh fruit, bagel, and string cheese or baked chips and salsa
- ✦ Cheese cubes, yogurt, pudding, frozen yogurt, flavored or white milk
- ✦ Fruit. Cut or sectioned fruit is more popular with students
- ✦ Carrots, radishes, broccoli, peppers or jicama; serve with low fat salad dressing
- ✦ Fruit and vegetable juices or a juice bar
- ✦ Beef jerky, nuts, seeds, trail mix
- ✦ Bean dip or peanut butter with saltine or graham crackers



Check Out...

School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide by the
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash

Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment by USDA's Team Nutrition
www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/changing.html

Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn, A School Health Policy by
The National Association of State Boards of Education
www.nasbe.org



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What You Can Do...

- ✦ Give students repeated opportunities to practice healthy eating skills.
- ✦ Ensure consistent messages in the classroom, cafeteria and other eating areas.
- ✦ Parents and school personnel establish guidelines for foods provided to students for school parties and snacks.
- ✦ Roam the halls with a cruising breakfast café. Offer muffins, sandwiches, yogurt parfaits, fruit, string cheese or milk.
- ✦ Form a Nutrition Advisory Council. Involve students, school food service personnel, parents and teachers to improve school nutrition.
- ✦ Create and implement school or district policy supporting a healthy school nutrition environment.



Joining the fight for improved child nutrition in schools and supporting the Healthy School Nutrition Environment initiative are the US Department of Agriculture, American Dietetic Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Hispanic Medical Association, and the National Medical Association.

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